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# UK IT Outsourcing in India

*The Clash of Offshored Development and Indian Culture*

Author: Michael May (mike@mikemayuk.com)

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## Contents

Abstract.....	1
Structure .....	2
Part I: Cultural Background	
1 Cultural Roots.....	4
1.1 The Caste System .....	4
1.2 Adopted Hierarchy .....	4
1.3 Deference.....	4
1.4 Status and Rewards.....	4
2 Applied Culture .....	5
2.1 Culture-based Personal Behavioural Drivers .....	5
2.2 Consequences in the Workplace.....	5
2.3 Resultant Individual Behaviour .....	6
2.4 Behavioural Contrasts.....	6
Part II: Roles and Stress	
3 Roles and Objectives.....	8
3.1 Roles and Role Sets .....	8
3.2 Role and Role Set Objectives .....	8
3.3 Role Order and Role Scaling.....	9
3.4 Role Set Transitions.....	9
3.5 Shadow Roles.....	10
4 Individual Stress .....	11
4.1 Causes of Stress .....	11
4.2 Root Cause of Stress .....	11
5 Role Conflict.....	12
5.1 Conflict Within the Role Set.....	12
5.2 Conflict Between Role Sets .....	13
5.3 Role Conflict and Stress .....	14
6 Response to Stress.....	15
Part III: Patterns of Behaviour	
7 The Outcomes Grid .....	17
7.1 Degradation from Sector 4 .....	17
7.2 Recovery from Degradation.....	18
7.3 Individual Reaction to Degradation Recovery .....	18
8 Role Conflict Drivers in the Indian Cultural Environment.....	20

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9	Impact on the Sector 4 Position in IT .....	21
9.1	Formal and Natural Hierarchies .....	21
9.2	Imposition of the Natural Hierarchy .....	21
9.3	Effect of the Natural Hierarchy Relationship .....	22
10	Maintenance of the Sector 4 Position in IT.....	24
10.1	The Psychological Environment .....	24
10.2	The Technical Environment .....	25
11	Summary .....	29
Appendices		
A	Source Notes .....	31
B	Sources.....	32

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## Figures

Figure 1 - Example Role Sets	8
Figure 2 –Ordered Roles Within A Role Set	9
Figure 3 - Scaled Roles Within A Role Set	9
Figure 4 - Role Set Transition	10
Figure 5 – Role Sets With Shadow Roles	10
Figure 6 – Scaling Stress Within Role Sets	12
Figure 7 - Eclipsing Stress Within Role Sets	13
Figure 8 – Increased Scaling of Shadow Roles	13
Figure 9 – Eclipsing Shadow Role	14
Figure 10 - The Outcomes Grid	17
Figure 11 - Actual Actions vs. Desired Actions	19
Figure 12 - Formal Hierarchy in an IT Environment	21
Figure 13 - Formal Hierarchy with Natural Hierarchy Imposed	22

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## Indian Culture and IT Outsourcing

The use of offshore and landed offshore staff on UK-originated software development and outsourcing projects, with a particular focus on staff in, or from, India, continues to grow. This growth has not been without its costs, however. Anecdotally, British project managers and team members alike report issues when interfacing with their Indian colleagues. Typically, these include statements along the lines of

- “They don’t do what we ask them to do”
- “They won’t answer a simple question”
- “They lie to us”

This paper is an attempt to outline the origins of and motivation for this apparent behaviour and to provide a basis for improving our ability to work with, rather than against, our Indian colleagues, thus improving our overall delivery capability.

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## Structure

This paper is divided into three sections.

*Part I: Cultural Background* outlines the principal cultural drivers that influence Indian behaviour and how that behaviour manifests itself in the workplace.

*Part II: Roles and Stress* introduces some broad concepts concerning the causes of personal stress, relates these concepts to the workplace environment and links them to the consequent behaviour of staff therein.

*Part III: Patterns of Behaviour* uses the concepts covered in Part I and Part II to describe the causes of the drift of the behaviour of the individual away from that which the organisation requires. It then sketches a high-level outline of a generalised methodology for the reduction of such drift.

In order to keep the paper as short as possible, much of the material is covered in brief and at a fairly high level. The expectation is that the logical progression between concepts will be such that the sense and verity of the subject matter will be clear.

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## **Part I: Cultural Background**

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# 1 Cultural Roots

## 1.1 The Caste System

Throughout history and into the present day, civilisations the world over have had their own particular societal systems. A common characteristic of such systems has been that of *stratification*, the division of the society into levels of hierarchy according to the rank or status of its members. The caste system of India is perhaps the stratification system best recognised by the British, thanks to our centuries-old trade relationships with that country and its subsequent colonisation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A feature of the caste system that is easily misunderstood by westerners, however, was the strength of its rigidity – movement between the strata was virtually unknown, an unfamiliar concept to those used to the British class system, in which such movement has become increasingly common over the years. The rigidity of the caste system reduced the degree to which the hierarchy could be diluted, a fact that has enabled it to survive, albeit as a cultural relic, into the present day.

## 1.2 Adopted Hierarchy

As the caste system was such a prominent feature of Indian daily life, a natural consequence was the adoption of the hierarchical principle within societal groupings – family, friends, neighbours etc. The stratification in such groupings was based on criteria appropriate to the composition of the group – age and the ability to contribute to the home economy within the family, for instance, and wealth and possessions within the wider community.

## 1.3 Deference

The caste system demanded that deference and respect be shown to those of a superior caste. Deference was, and still is, paid to those viewed as superior in some way, whether within a formal system of hierarchy such as the workplace environment or an informal, or *natural*, hierarchy that has developed within some societal grouping.

## 1.4 Status and Rewards

While mobility between the strata of the original caste system was severely limited, if not impossible, within the natural hierarchies of the societal groupings it is not only possible but positively encouraged. An individual is thus able to promote himself within the hierarchy by achieving that which the hierarchy values and which confers status. Thus, achievement and reward have become strong motivators in Indian society.

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# 2 Applied Culture

## 2.1 Culture-based Personal Behavioural Drivers

Greatly simplifying the influence and consequences of the Indian cultural background, the broad rules that drive personal behavioural are

- Observe the formal and informal hierarchies
- Show deference to those superior to oneself
- Strive to increase one's rank and status

## 2.2 Consequences in the Workplace

While the mixing together of many different backgrounds within a large workgroup could be expected to dilute many of the cultural impositions of society, the notion of hierarchy still manifests itself strongly there. The organisation itself underpins the idea of hierarchy, since it imposes one of its own that extends from the company's chief executive down to the lowest-level workers. This explicit sanction for the existence of hierarchy encourages the culturally-induced tendency within the individual to look for and impose hierarchical structures where they do not formally exist. Thus, hierarchies that do not appear on any organisation chart will exist within, between and across the organisation.

However, because these hierarchies are not official, an individual will not have the necessary clarity to deem themselves to be definitely the superior or inferior party of a particular interpersonal relationship within one, except where this is clearly supported by the formal organisational hierarchies or by the example of those colleagues already entrenched in the natural hierarchy. Where doubt exists, observance of the rule of deference towards one's superiors leads to a tendency to initially assume a *subservient* position within any relationship until evidence to the contrary is established. The individual is also aware that the natural hierarchies have arisen with the tacit support of the formal hierarchy; there is therefore a fear that any appearance of subverting the *natural* hierarchy will also be seen as a subversion of the *formal* hierarchy. Thus, where the formal organisational hierarchy does not make clear the precedence of the relationship between the individual and one or another of his colleagues, that individual will assume a subservient role whilst searching for further evidence of the nature and direction of the relationship. Strong indicators for this arise from the contribution that the individual's role, and that of the sub-organisation to which the individual belongs, make to the overall goals of the organisation. Drivers for the individual's attempts to identify the hierarchy thus include the positions of the individuals and their organisational subassemblies relative to the customer, the product, the business process and elements of the formal hierarchy.

Once the hierarchies have been established, the individual is able to seek opportunities to increase his rank and status within the organisation by increasing his rank and status within both the formal hierarchy of the organisation and the informal hierarchies to which he has come to belong. This action has a two-pronged approach: on the one hand, he will take advantage of opportunities to

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demonstrate his competence and abilities in order to win promotion; on the other, he will avoid circumstances that risk making him appear other than competent and which therefore threaten his image in the eyes of those responsible for his upward career path.

### **2.3 Resultant Individual Behaviour**

Once the nature of the hierarchy has been established by the individual, he will act according to the stereotype – giving firm and clear direction to those who are perceived, and who perceive themselves, as subordinate in the relationship, behaving subserviently to those he judges to be his superiors, seeking opportunities to increase his status within both the formal and natural hierarchies and avoiding opportunities that risk causing him to appear other than completely competent. The superior party of any relationship will expect to be able direct the work of the subordinate without having his authority questioned, and the subordinate party will not want to appear to question such direction in order to avoid appearing unsure, incompetent or disrespectful.

### **2.4 Behavioural Contrasts**

Whilst this strict adherence to hierarchy and deference may appear at first sight to be harmless, the typical western working relationship generally expects a dialogue to exist between manager and subordinate, such that an order is expressed as a request and there is ample scope for questions to be asked – the manager expects the subordinate to act with initiative and to question where appropriate in order to provide sufficient information for the task to be performed and for that initiative to be applied. The Indian mode of working contrasts noticeably with this, particularly in the domain of IT wherein, even today, work in the west still tends to be directed according to a variable number of imprecise and ambiguous communications.

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## **Part II: Individual Roles and Stress**

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# 3 Roles and Objectives

## 3.1 Roles and Role Sets

Individuals occupy a wide range of roles. The roles that apply to an individual will change as his life circumstances change – employee, spouse, parent. Some roles may last nearly a lifetime – friend, brother. Other roles last a shorter time – student, homebuyer. Considering the full set of roles occupied by an individual at any one time, they may be grouped into *role sets* that contain roles that are more closely related to one another than they are to the other roles that the individual occupies, and that these groupings are identified with the different modes or circumstances that the individual will occupy at different times. An example of roles and their role set groupings within various modes is shown in Figure 1.

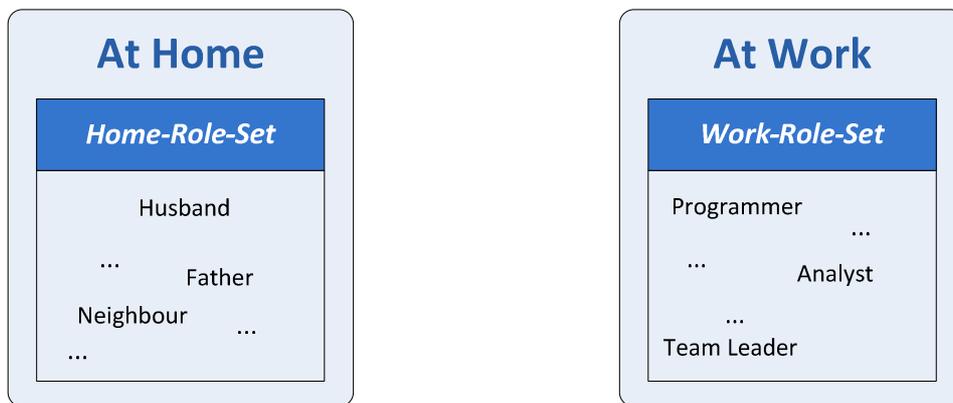


Figure 1 - Example Role Sets

## 3.2 Role and Role Set Objectives

Each role set has an objective for each individual, albeit one that is loosely-framed and nebulous. The Home Role Set, for instance, may have an objective of being happy, well-regarded and prosperous with a positive outlook. Each role within this role set has individual objectives that contribute to the larger role set objective. For instance, for the *Home-Role-Set* of Figure 1:

- Father:* Children are happy and play well, are doing well at school, form quality friendships and are involved in extramural activities that they enjoy
- Husband:* Attentive and supportive to wife, contributing to household chores and child care
- Neighbour:* Attends community events, helps neighbours with gardening, DIY etc and is sociable and well-liked

The actions necessary to achieve each of these role objectives will shape and influence the overall behaviour of the individual within that role set – e.g. spending time playing with the children, cleaning the kitchen and attending the local community watch meeting.

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### 3.3 Role Order and Role Scaling

The importance to the individual of each role within the role set is determined by such factors as the relative importance of that role's objectives to the individual and by the contribution made by that role's objectives to the achievement of the overall objectives of the role set. This establishes a priority order for the roles. In a complex role set, the order may exist as a hierarchy, with some roles achieving equal priority in the role list. Examples of simple ordered roles are shown in Figure 2.

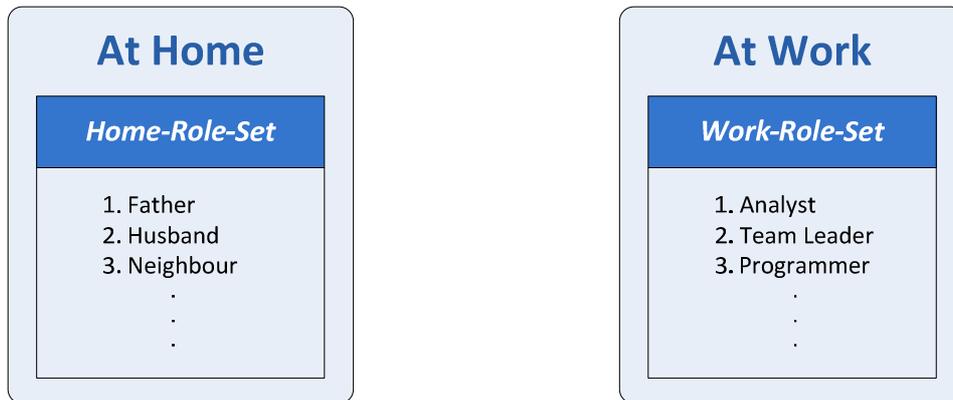


Figure 2 –Ordered Roles Within A Role Set

However, the roles are not merely ordered but *scaled*. For instance, the Husband role may not be simply more important to a particular individual than the Neighbour role, but *significantly* more important. This can be illustrated by dividing up the available time, emotional, financial and other resources available to the individual proportionate to the scale of the role objectives, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3 - Scaled Roles Within A Role Set

### 3.4 Role Set Transitions

The set of roles active at any one time change depending on the individual's circumstances. These changes can occur over short terms – leaving the work environment and arriving home, for example

– or longer terms – becoming proficient at a particular skill, for instance, thus moving from the role of novice to that of expert. This concept is illustrated in Figure 4.

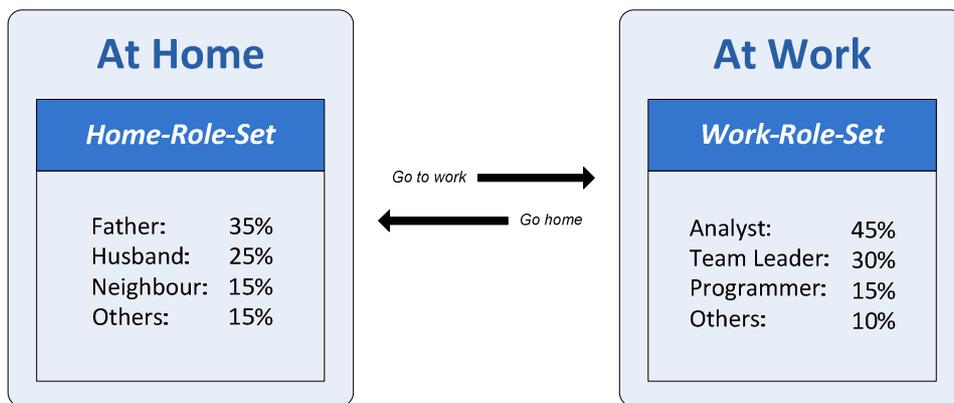


Figure 4 - Role Set Transition

A critical point to be aware of is that, when the individual is in the mode that corresponds to a particular role set, he experiences an extremely strong need to exercise those behaviours that contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the role set and its roles.

### 3.5 Shadow Roles

Where role set changes occur over shorter timescales, such as the change from office worker to family man, vestiges of the former role set may persist. The roles that are not currently active still remain, but are no longer prominent in influencing the behaviours of the individual. They become *shadow roles* within the current role set, as shown in Figure 5.

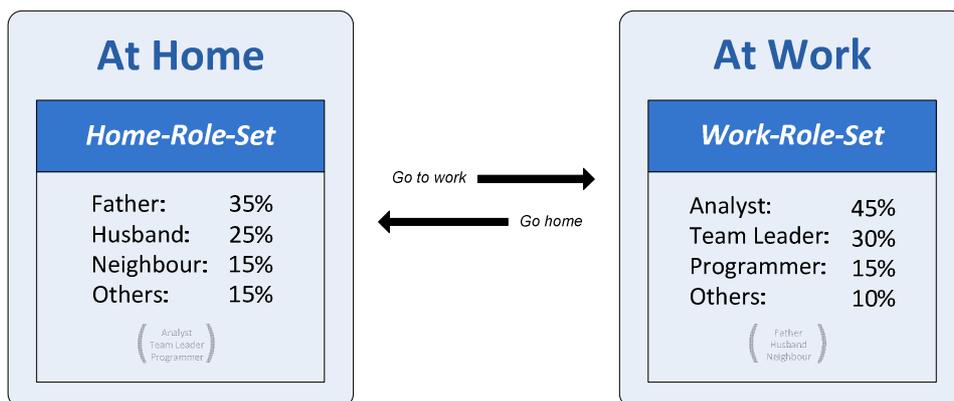


Figure 5 – Role Sets With Shadow Roles

Examples of the intrusion of a shadow role into the current role set are illustrated by the individual who is at home with his family but is thinking about a work meeting set to take place the following day, or by the person making casual notes concerning the requirements for a child’s birthday party whilst at work.

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# 4 Individual Stress

## 4.1 Causes of Stress

The causes of personal stress have been established as being those events that cause significant change in the individual's life, to the extent of being accepted as axiomatic. Lists of such causes of stress generally include

- Divorce
- Redundancy
- Wedding
- Moving House
- New Baby
- Dispute with a Neighbour
- Court Appearance

## 4.2 Root Cause of Stress

Consideration of the above shows that each involves a considerable degree of loss of control over the individual's life. Divorce is the replacement of a routine, albeit possibly unhappy, existence with one of anger and disruption. Redundancy casts the individual out of the world of work, with predictable income and routine, into one of great uncertainty. A wedding requires a great deal of planning and intrudes heavily into ordinary life. A house move calls for substantial disruption to the everyday path of life whilst those aspects not related to the home – work, relations – must continue as normal. A new baby will command a great deal of attention from the family, regardless of what other plans may exist. A dispute with a neighbour turns the home, normally a place of safety and comfort, into a surrogate battlefield. A court appearance puts one at the mercy of the authorities.

Whilst a case may be made for any of the above events having other factors that contribute to the induced stress (the need to spend money that the individual would prefer was spent elsewhere, anger at the unreasonable behaviour of one's neighbour), loss of control is both common to all of them and, upon closer analysis, can in any case be cited as being itself the cause of these additional factors. Thus it may be concluded that a loss of control or influence over one's life is the root cause of stress.

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# 5 Role Conflict

## 5.1 Conflict Within the Role Set

Conflict between the roles inhabited by an individual occur when the objectives of one role conflict with another. In the Home Role Set, for instance, the subject's twin objectives of being a good neighbour and a good husband may be in conflict if his wife falls out with his neighbour – he must support his wife in order to be a good husband, but needs to remain cordial with his neighbour in order to be a good neighbour. Generally, the priority and scaling of roles within the role set will determine which objective is served, and which is given less attention. However, it is possible for circumstances to come about that usurp the usual role priority, causing disproportionately more attention to be paid to lower-priority roles at the expense of higher-priority ones. The resulting imbalance compromises the individual's ability to pursue the role set objectives according to the desired hierarchy. This loss of control leads to feelings of personal stress. An example is shown in Figure 6.

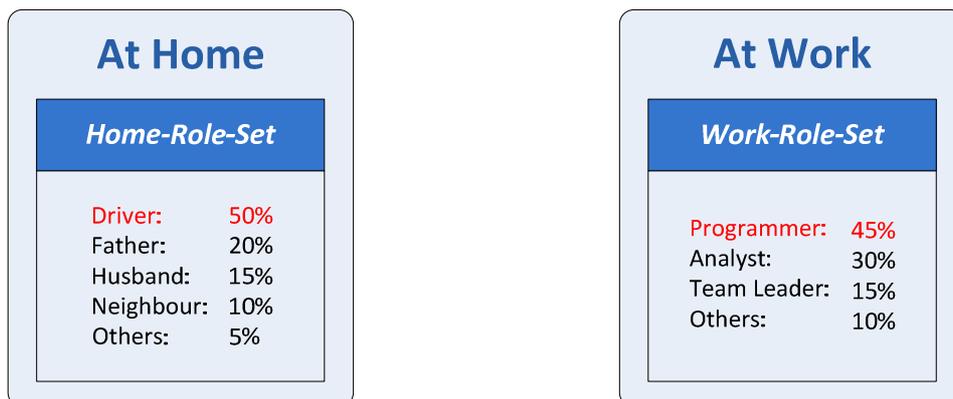


Figure 6 – Scaling Stress Within Role Sets

Within the Home Role Set, the subject's personal life has been upset by the unexpected notice of a court appearance for a speeding offence and the normally highly diminished role of Driver (which normally resides in the "Others" pseudo-role) has been elevated to the highest importance. In the Work Role Set, the demands of the project mean that the Programmer role has assumed highest priority. In extreme cases, a single role can eclipse all other roles in the role set, as shown in Figure 7.

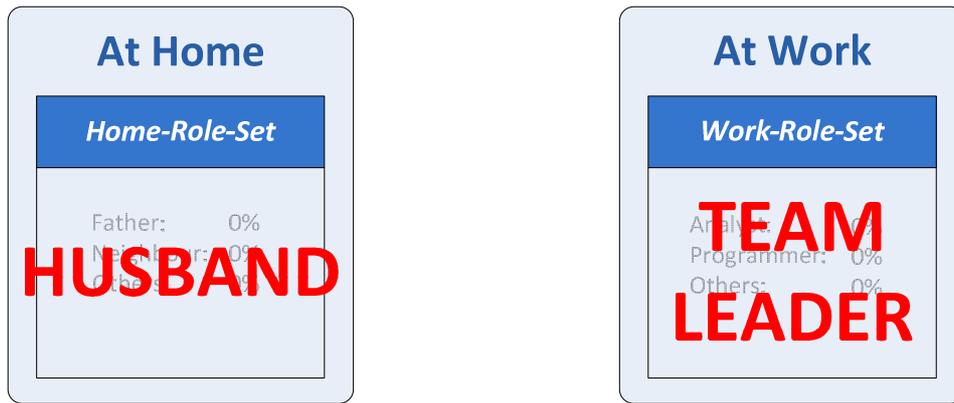


Figure 7 - Eclipsing Stress Within Role Sets

## 5.2 Conflict Between Role Sets

As shown in Section 3.5, an individual in one role set harbours vestiges of other role sets – the shadow roles. Under certain conditions, the prominence of a shadow role can increase dramatically within the current role. This is shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8 – Increased Scaling of Shadow Roles

In extreme conditions, the shadow role can grow so large within the host role set as to not merely compete for attention with the normal roles but actually to eclipse them. This *eclipsing role* is illustrated in Figure 9.

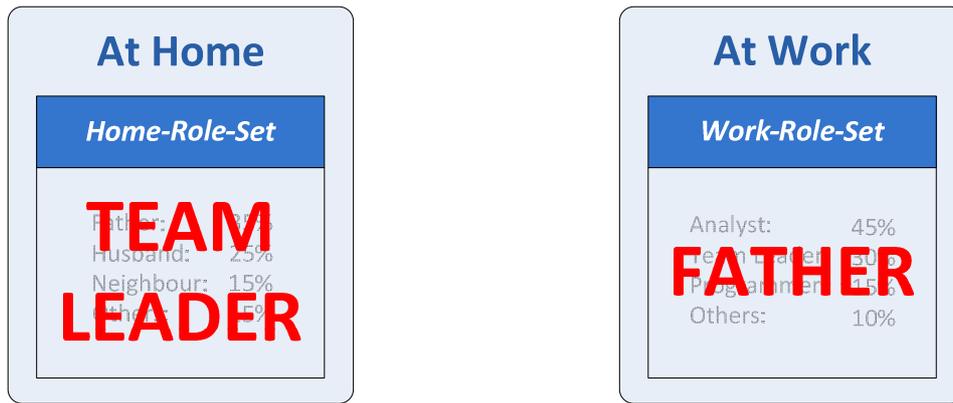


Figure 9 – Eclipsing Shadow Role

Here, the Team Leader role from the Work Role Set, normally present in the Home Role Set only as a shadow, has expanded in prominence there to the extent that it has eclipsed the normal roles of the Home Role Set. Correspondingly, a family crisis, such as the death of a loved one, can cause a shadow role in the Work Role Set (e.g. the Father role) to become an eclipsing role there.

### 5.3 Role Conflict and Stress

Under circumstances of role conflict, loss of control is evident, and therefore stress ensues.

In cases where role conflict occurs *within* a role set, the sense of loss of control is less than in cases where it is due to conflict *between* role sets. In the former case, the individual is still functioning in accordance with the current role set, and is still contributing to the achievement of the objectives of that role set, but is doing so with a significantly altered balance of priorities. He also has a certain degree of control as to the extent to which the usurping role is allowed to exert itself – hence, the loss of control is itself, to a certain extent, controllable.

Where conflict occurs between role sets, however, the individual is not merely functioning out-of-character for the role set that should be active in the current circumstance (e.g. at home), he is being forced into a completely different role set, one that is inappropriate to the current circumstance (i.e. Work-Role-Set). He is thus completely unable to behave in a manner appropriate to the pursuit of the objectives of the current circumstance. The loss of control is thus much greater, as is the consequent feeling of stress.

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# 6

## Response to Stress

While many people engage in activities that might be considered to be stress inducing, such as mountaineering or parachute jumping, is important to note they do this for pleasure and excitement and actively seek to reduce the scope for stress when taking part – the reserve parachute, the secure ropes. Excitement is attractive, stress is not. Thus, It is axiomatic that people seek to reduce or eliminate stress.

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## **Part III: Patterns of Behaviour**

# 7

## The Outcomes Grid

The Outcomes Grid is a simple construction, based around the intersection between a basic personal objective and a basic project objective: the individual wishes to be *happy* rather than *sad*, and the project is required to be a *success* rather than a *failure*. The Grid appears in Figure 10.

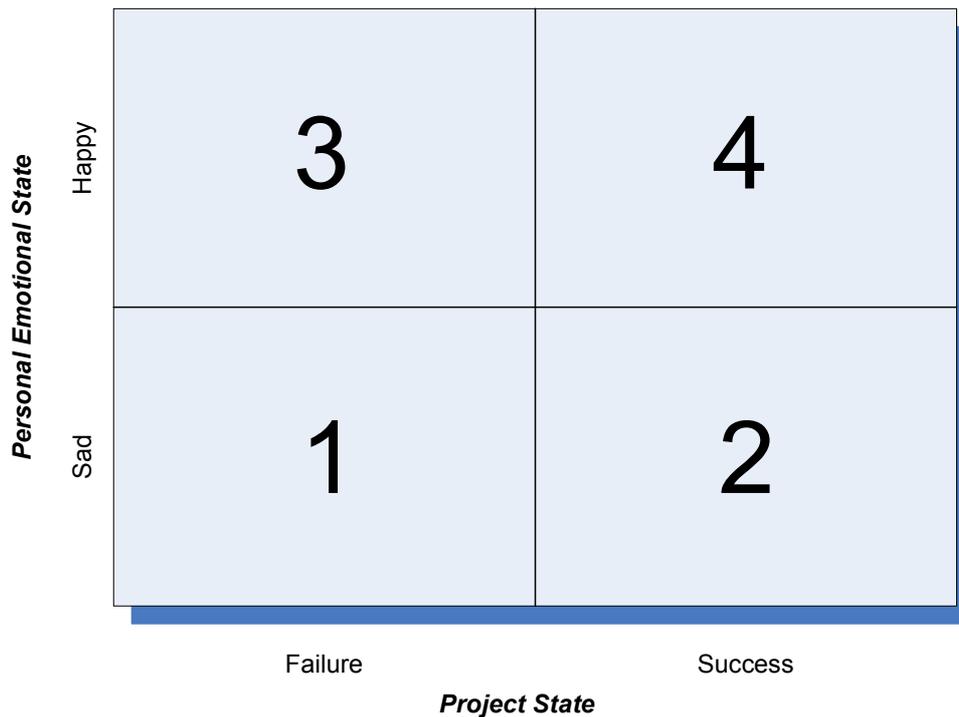


Figure 10 - The Outcomes Grid

Clearly, an individual will wish to find themselves in Sector 3 or Sector 4 – the Happy sectors. Those involved in a project of some kind will also wish to be in Sector 2 or Sector 4 – the Success sectors. The ideal state for those involved in a project to be in is, of course, Sector 4, since individuals are Happy and the project is a Success.

### 7.1 Degradation from Sector 4

Referring to Figure 10, degradation of the ideal pattern for the individual and the project occurs when the status moves from Sector 4 (Happy-Success) to Sector 1 (Sad-Failure), either directly or via Sector 2 (Sad-Success) or Sector 3 (Happy-Failure). Some necessarily superficial yet plausible scenarios surrounding such degradation might be

- Sudden, catastrophic change, such as drastically reduced funding without a corresponding reduction in scope. This could conceivably cause a transition from Sector 4 directly to Sector 1 since the resources are inadequate to perform the work (Failure) and staff morale suffers from the unrealistic demands being made (Sad)

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- Extensive external pressure to deliver without regard to the project plan. Misuse of resources to pursue unrealistic objectives causes an initial transition from Sector 4 to Sector 2 (Sad-Success). The drop in morale impacts work rate and quality, causing a further transition to Sector 1
  - Poor specification of the problem, leading to a large number of change requests. The resulting backlog of work is not reflected in the existing schedule and a quiet transition to Sector 3 (Happy-Failure) follows. When the work requests are released to the project team, the sense that the project is out of control leads to fall in morale and a corresponding transition to Sector 1

## 7.2 Recovery from Degradation

As the project degrades from either Success sector to either Fail sector, management will necessarily take action to recover the Success position. Whilst a project pause followed by a replan and the addition of resources (staff, time, budget) or a reduction in scope is possible, more recognisable responses are

- Tightened deadlines
- Mandatory overtime
- Weekend working

Tightened deadlines cause role objectives to become compromised (there is insufficient time to do the work properly); mandatory overtime causes role conflict as roles become reordered and rescaled (as shown in Section 5.1); and weekend working causes further role conflict as the Work Role Set intrudes into the Home Role Set (as shown in Section 5.2). The resultant loss of control over the individual's life leads to personal stress, as outlined in sections 4.2 and 5.3.

## 7.3 Individual Reaction to Degradation Recovery

The intention of project management is to maintain the project position in Sector 4 of the Outcomes Grid. However, as outlined in Section 7.2, it is possible for the demands of project management to place the individual at risk of moving into Sector 2 – the project is in the Success state but the individual is no longer in the Happy state.

The presence of the individual in the Sad sectors can be attributed to the onset of stress owing to role conflict and consequent loss of control. However, as stated in Section 6, the individual will seek ways to reduce or eliminate stress. It is logical to expect that this might be achieved by acting so as to reduce the *causes* of that stress – the loss of control and the role conflict that leads to it. Thus, where an action required by the project management to achieve some project objective is likely to cause role conflict and consequent stress for the individual, that individual may choose to act in a way that is contra to that required in order to avoid the role conflict. This applies equally to any individual placed in a position wherein he risks moving from either Happy sector (3 and 4) to either Sad sector (1 and 2).

Figure 11 shows the divergence between the Required and Actual actions of the individual seeking to avoid stress.

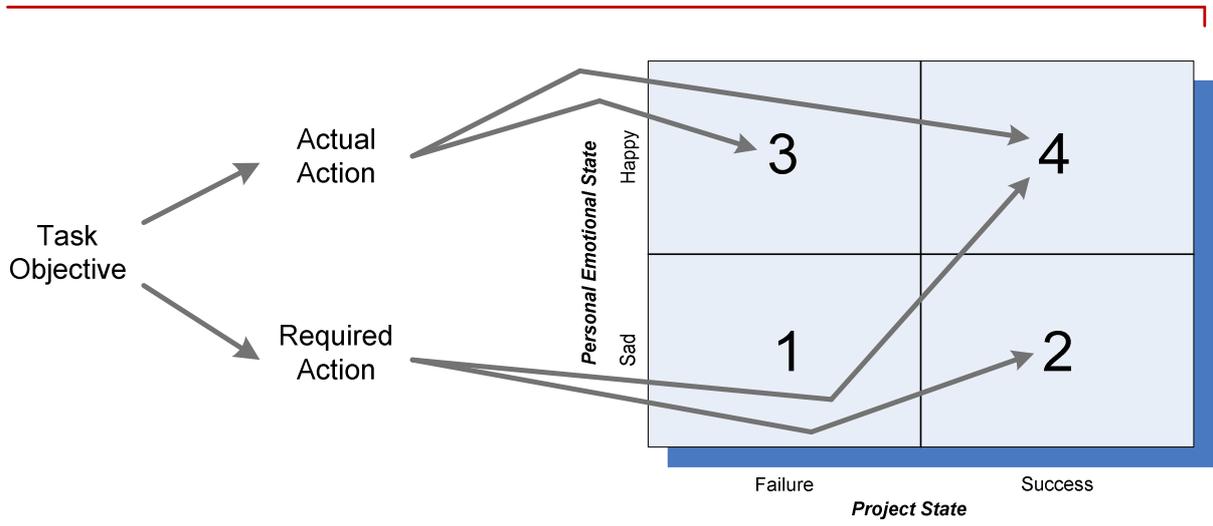


Figure 11 - Actual Actions vs. Desired Actions

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# 8

## Role Conflict Drivers in the Indian Cultural Environment

Circumstances that risk forcing the individual to act contrary to the principal drivers outlined in section 2.1 above will introduce role conflict for that individual. For the Indian, some simple examples are:

<b>Role Driver</b>	<b>Role Conflict Driver</b>
Observe the hierarchy (formal)	A requirement to perform some work as a result of an instruction from someone whose position within, or relative to, the formal hierarchy is not clear
Observe hierarchy (informal)	A requirement to correct or criticise the work of a colleague who is perceived as being senior by virtue of his abilities or time served with the company
Show deference to those superior to oneself within the hierarchy	A requirement to question instructions received from a colleague perceived as, or actually, senior within the formal or natural hierarchy
Strive to increase one's rank and status within the hierarchies	A requirement to act or make a decision outside the competence or experience of the individual, thereby increasing the likelihood of error and, thus, of appearing incompetent

It should be understood that, for the Indian, behavioural drivers are very deeply rooted and, consequently, the role conflict stresses induced by the above are much more keenly felt than they would be to the westerner.

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# 9

## Impact on the Sector 4 Position in IT

### 9.1 Formal and Natural Hierarchies

Formal hierarchies exist within the software development process: Developers and Testers work under the direction of the Business and Technical Analysts who, in turn, are directed by the Project Manager. Larger projects spawn a greater diversity of roles and titles, but the existence of formal hierarchies remains, even, perhaps, being additionally complicated by the addition of matrix-style management.

Next to these formal hierarchies are the informal hierarchies – or *natural* hierarchies, since they have up grown of their own accord without being externally imposed. Each individual examines his relationship to each of his colleagues with a keen regard to their position relative to the business of the company, division and department for which they both work. Thus, for instance, the apparent horizontal relationship between developers and system testers is actually seen as a hierarchy in which the developers – who are contributing directly to the creation of the product – are more valuable, and hence have higher status, than the system testers, whose role is essentially one of simply checking that the product works. Similar degrees of status will exist, for example, between those DBAs and systems administrators who support production applications and those supporting development and test systems, since the former are closer to the business of the employing organisation.

### 9.2 Imposition of the Natural Hierarchy

Figure 12 shows a condensed example of a formal hierarchy within a typical IT project. The Project Manager oversees the project, the Business Analysts and Technical Designers shape the solution and the Developers and Testers build it and make sure it works as required.

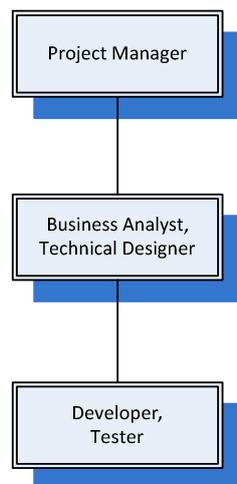


Figure 12 - Formal Hierarchy in an IT Environment

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To illustrate the effect of the imposition of a natural hierarchy, consider the formal hierarchy from the perspective of the Tester role. The Tester has a relationship with the Developer that is nominally that of equals, as shown in the formal organisation chart. However, the work they perform is quite different, which indicates that they may not be equal contributors to the delivery of the project. In order to respect the need for hierarchy, the Tester will therefore search for signs of an hierarchical relationship with the Developer before assuming that the relationship is one of equals. One sign that the Developer is of greater status within the hierarchy is that he is directly contributing to the product by producing program code. The Tester will thus naturally assume a subservient role within the relationship with the Developer. Conversely, and for the same reason, the developer will attempt to assume a superior role in the relationship.

Having established an hierarchical relationship with the Developer, the Tester is able to refine relationships with the Business Analyst and Technical Designer. Whilst nominally equal to each other in the formal hierarchy, the Tester needs to establish the distance between himself and each of them in the hierarchy – this will aid in determining to which greater deference needs to be shown. The Tester is able to establish that the Developer is responsible to the Business Analyst for the functional aspects of the code and to the Technical Designer for the technical aspects. As the Tester’s role is also related to the functional aspects, a closer relationship to the Business Analyst is assumed. The altered set of relationships is shown in Figure 13.

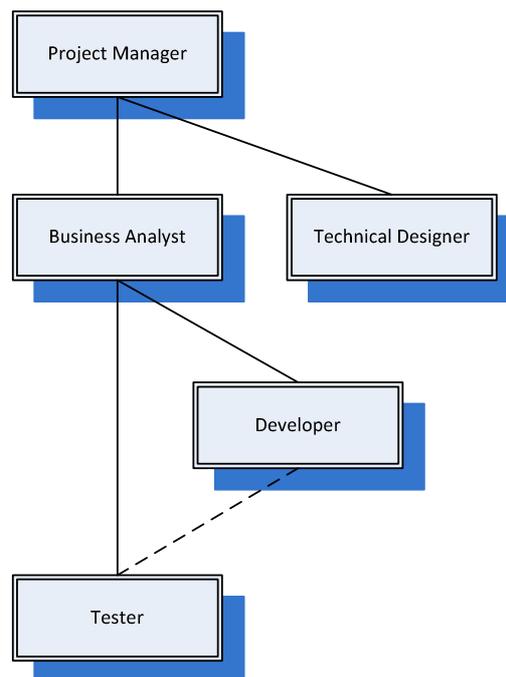


Figure 13 - Formal Hierarchy with Natural Hierarchy Imposed

### 9.3 Effect of the Natural Hierarchy Relationship

The role of the Tester is to determine whether or not the software delivered by the Developer meets the requirements. The natural hierarchy shows that the Tester sees the Developer as superior to himself. Thus, to show that the software does *not* meet the requirements is to demonstrate that the

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Developer is inadequate. This places the Tester in a position of role conflict, since to demonstrate the Developer's shortcomings is to show disrespect to the Developer.

To avoid this, the Tester may adopt a number strategies for avoiding demonstrating the lack of conformance of the software:

- Loose interpretation of the requirements
- Loose interpretation of the test plan and expected results
- Rationalising of nonconforming results
- Rationalising reasons to omit test steps that have yielded nonconforming results
- Confirming with the developer how the software is meant to function, thus aligning their interpretations of the requirements

Thus, while the *required* action is to test the software and report the results accurately, the *actual* action is to reduce or eliminate the potential for role conflict and consequent stress, as shown in Figure 11.

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# 10

## Maintenance of the Sector 4 Position in IT

### 10.1 The Psychological Environment

In order to achieve the required modes of operations, it is necessary to create a psychological environment within which the natural hierarchies that the team members form will align closely with the formal hierarchies and will not threaten the successful functioning of the project processes. It is therefore necessary to make clear the relationship that each role within the project has to the objectives of the programme, and that these relationships are superior to the relationships that the individual may form with other members of the team. This rationale is supported to some extent by the establishment of the natural hierarchy according to the contribution made by the individual and his sub-organisation to the organisational objectives (noted in the latter part of Section 2.2); however, some adjustment is necessary before the natural hierarchies fully support the project goals.

The team member needs to be helped to internalise the fact that:

- (i) He has a greater obligation to the project, to the programme and to the organisation than he has to his colleagues
- (ii) The actions that are required of him are intended to meet that greater obligation
- (iii) An action that might appear to threaten the relationship that the individual has with another team member actually helps that team member to contribute to the greater obligation by helping him to improve his performance

Applying the above considerations to the Tester role:

- (i) The Tester is part of an organisational subsystem (the project) that has an overriding objective (the greater obligation) of creating a technology system that enables the organisation to survive and grow in its chosen markets
- (ii) The role of the Tester is to confirm that the system being built meets the requirements of the organisation and to ensure that elements of the system that do not meet those requirements are do not proceed to release, thus reducing the threat to the organisation from nonconforming software
- (iii) In detecting non-conforming software, the Tester provides the Designer who produced the technical specification and the Developer who produced the code with the opportunity to improve their design, development and communication skills. This reduces the likelihood of their contributing to future non-conformance of the system, thus increasing their contribution to the organisational objectives and their value to the organisation

It should be noted that, in practice, success in the above approach requires that two difficult and, practically speaking, unlikely conditions be met

- (i) That management is convinced of the efficacy of the approach to the extent that they are willing to commit the required resources to similarly convince the Indian staff that the environment exists within which they are able to safely work contrary to their culture
- (ii) That the Indian staff are able to counter the influence of several hundred years of culture and perform as required

## 10.2 The Technical Environment

Whilst the provision of an environment that allows Indian staff to feel able to challenge their superiors and colleagues in safety is a laudable aim, in reality it is likely to be difficult to achieve, not least because it requires Indians to behave in a manner that is completely contrary to a conditioning that is rooted in thousands of years of applied culture. As explained above, such behaviour is extremely painful to the individual, and may itself lead to undesirable consequences, such as stress-related medical conditions or the individual leaving the company in order to avoid being repeatedly forced into such a position.

It is also difficult for management to provide such an environment, as the learning that is required in order to understand that the environment as provided is not a natural fit to Indian culture is not intuitive. Simply telling staff that certain – as they see it – forbidden behaviours are permissible and desirable is not enough – such statements need to be specifically and continually reinforced. Such action represents a distraction from the everyday business of the project, department or organisation.

A more successful approach for the western management team may be derived by adjusting the environment so as to reduce the *need* for the Indian to act counter to his culture. To reiterate the Indian culturally-based behavioural conflict drivers from section 8 above:

Role Driver	Role Conflict Driver
Observe the hierarchy (formal)	A requirement to perform some work as a result of an instruction from someone whose position within, or relative to, the formal hierarchy is not clear
Observe hierarchy (informal)	A requirement to correct or criticise the work of a colleague who is perceived as being senior by virtue of his abilities or time served with the company
Show deference to those superior to oneself within the hierarchy	A requirement to question instructions received from a colleague perceived as, or actually, senior within the formal or natural hierarchy
Strive to increase one's rank and status within the hierarchies	A requirement to act or make a decision outside the competence or experience of the individual, thereby increasing the likelihood of error and, thus, of appearing incompetent

Litigators for these conflict drivers will now be addressed.

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### 10.2.1 Observe the Formal Hierarchy

Relative to India, and to much of the rest of the world, informality is a defining characteristic of the modern western, and particularly the British, working environment. In most organisations, it is acceptable, even usual, for interactions to take place between employees and managers at widely varying levels of the organisational hierarchy, and across diverse branches of that hierarchy. A programmer will casually pass the time with a programme manager from another division; the chief executive will chat with an HR administrator he meets in the lift.

All of this serves to undermine the formal hierarchy. To the Indian observer, accustomed as he is to a strongly hierarchical environment where position and authority are firmly acknowledged, such interactions contribute to a denial that the formal hierarchy can be relied upon. This creates uncertainty and doubt in the observer's mind: to where should his deference be directed? Whose directions should be followed? Fear of finding the wrong answers to these questions leads to a general sense of fear within the individual that severely impacts his ability to perform.

It is therefore necessary to counteract the influence of this informality by enforcing the formal aspects of the hierarchy within the work context. Management must make clear to all involved that

- All management and staff exist within a defined and recognisable hierarchy of authority
- Any individual takes direction from a single manager in that hierarchy
- Attempts to work outside the hierarchy are the exception rather than the rule

In the western organisation, this may be difficult to apply in practice; however, a strong management team whose interpersonal relationships are based on mutual respect and an understanding of the reasons for it may be able to make it work effectively.

### 10.2.2 Observe the Informal Hierarchy

Notwithstanding the strengthening of the imposition of the formal hierarchy outlined above, the informal will still pervade, given the need for individuals and teams to interact across the organisation and thus form informal relationships in order to perform their work. The organisation must therefore take steps to ensure that such interactions are supported by a framework based upon the formal hierarchy, such that inter-team and interpersonal interactions take place through communications pathways provided by that hierarchy. Features of such a framework include

- Terms of Reference for cross-organisational teams that state clearly the hierarchy of authority that exists according to the context of the work that the overall team is engaged in
- Defined processes for engagement with individuals and teams outside one's own branch of the organisational hierarchy
- Fault-free resolution procedures to be followed when an individual feels he is being approached outside the hierarchy of authority and needs to obtain further clarity

Such measures will serve to mitigate the effect of informal hierarchies undermining the formal hierarchies and leading to conflict of direction and focus within the individual.

### 10.2.3 Show Deference to One's Superiors

In the western organisation, even those interactions that take place within the formal hierarchy will nevertheless take place in a somewhat informal fashion. This conflicts with the Indian's need to

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show deference to his superiors by providing an environment in which it may not be clear whether an encounter is intended to be treated seriously – for instance, a manager jokes that some errant piece of code should be thrown away and the programmer start work again. Moreover, encounters that are meant to operate as a two-way street in which the manager seeks informative input from the employee may result in the employee simply reflecting what he feels is the manager’s already established opinion.

To mitigate this, a cultural buffer is needed to shield the Indian from western culture. We are fortunate to have a large number of UK-grown Indians, those who were born and brought up in the west. Such people tend to have extensive ties to family in India and make regular trips there. They are therefore highly familiar with Indian culture, and are therefore able to bridge the culture gap, being able to operate within both. Using a UK-Indian as a communications conduit between Indian employees and UK management provides a means of reducing the cultural mismatch of the overall exchange.

#### **10.2.4 Strive for Increased Rank**

The Indian seeks to improve his rank through

- Appearing competent or above-competent in his work
- Avoiding mistakes that would make him appear incompetent

The tendency in the UK is towards providing information at a fairly high-level and expecting the employee to act on his initiative or seek further clarification. This puts the Indian at risk either of appearing ignorant (since his culture leads him to expect management to provide detailed

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instructions and information) or of making mistakes due to acting on inadequate information.

The mitigation approach here is as simple as it is obvious: management needs to promote an environment in which information is as detailed as necessary to be unambiguous and instructions and expectations are clear. This will work well in combination with the previous method as the use of a UK-Indian will work effectively to fill the knowledge communication gaps and clear up any residual doubts caused by poor written expression. Such an environment can be brought about by several means, but the use of an established management methodology with clear requirements for documentation and communication structures can help. Strategic positioning of experienced, knowledgeable staff will also help as they can provide a source of information without forcing the Indian employee to approach his manager.

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# 11

## Summary

The low financial cost of Indian human resource presents excellent opportunities for leveraging the financial assets of any UK company that is able to make effective use of it. However, the specific nature of any business provides its own hurdles. In IT systems development, the overall process is essentially one of the translation of information from one form to another, producing a communications chain that is prone to the vagaries of human nature and social programming. This paper has identified at least some of the consequent issues and their causes and has proposed some potential solutions. The effectiveness of those solutions depends on the extent to which the problems are understood and the depth to which they are believed in and applied. Furthermore

**There are no silver bullets**

**Every person is an individual**

**Every situation is unique**

Good luck.

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## Appendices

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# A

## Source Notes

My employer doesn't pay me to sit in the local University library all day, doing research and watching attractive young students at their studies. If they did, this paper might have been completed a lot sooner – or not at all. Consequently, the research aspect of the paper consists almost entirely of trawling the internet for material regarding Indian culture and the Indian business environment. Only the fact that such material is in broad agreement and has generally rested where it was found for a number years lends it credibility.

Much, if not all, of the content surrounding the psychology of the business environment is direct from my head but has its basis in studies of material some years ago for my postgraduate diploma. I believe it stands on its own but would certainly benefit from a few hours spent in the library.

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# B Sources

## Literature

*Understanding Indian Culture & Bridging the Communication Gap*, Subodh Gupta, 2008, ISBN 978-0955688256, Amazon UK [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Understanding-Indian-Culture-Bridging-Communication/dp/0955688256/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1311169203&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Understanding-Indian-Culture-Bridging-Communication/dp/0955688256/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1311169203&sr=8-1)

*A Pocket Guide to Indian Business Etiquette*, HipCoders Pty Ltd, 2006. eBook, available from [http://www.hipcoders.com/india\\_business\\_etiquette/](http://www.hipcoders.com/india_business_etiquette/)

## Internet

There is no guarantee that any of these sites still exists or that the source material gathered may still be found there. A Google search on “Indian Business Culture” will yield the current wisdom.

[http://www.stylusinc.com/business/india/cultural\\_tips.htm](http://www.stylusinc.com/business/india/cultural_tips.htm)

<http://www.worldbusinessculture.com/Business-in-India.html>

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<http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=India>